

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

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REP. TRENT VAN HAAFTEN'S STATEHOUSE REPORT

INDIANAPOLIS – Indiana House members voted on two bills this week that give me great concern about their impact on the people of Southwest Indiana.

House Bill 1003 has been billed as Gov. Mitch Daniels' first economic proposal for Indiana. I applaud his commitment, but the bill that passed the House this week has the potential to exclude many areas of the state from having a vested interest in the growth of our economy.

Currently, there are a number of advisory boards with members from around the state that provide advice and direction for Indiana's economic development, in areas ranging from tourism to rural development. House Bill 1003 will replace over 150 individuals on those boards with a 12-member board that will oversee the Indiana Economic Development Corporation. The governor will chair this new board and have the sole authority to appoint the remaining 11 members.

Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that these appointments will ensure that areas such as Southwest Indiana have representation on the board. It would be a political mistake for the governor to ignore our area of the state. Furthermore, I do not feel comfortable with consolidating so much power over Hoosier tax dollars into the hands of one officeholder.

I voted against HB 1003 because equal representation on the board should be guaranteed and not just assumed or promised. It is my hope that as the bill passes on to the Senate there will be steps taken to guarantee that all regions of Indiana have a voice on this small and powerful board.

House Bill 1004, which has been termed the Tax Amnesty Bill, also passed out of the House without my vote of support.

In my view, this bill is too lenient on those that have failed to pay their taxes. If a corporation or individual owes delinquent taxes to the state, they will be given an eight-week period to pay these taxes, without having to pay any interest or penalty.

It seems wrong to me that so many of us struggle to pay our taxes on time, but a corporation that owes hundreds of thousands of dollars in delinquent taxes is given a free pass.

As I argued on the floor of the House, wiping the entire slate clean without even paying a reduced penalty is wrong for all Hoosiers. Once again, I hope that the Senate takes steps to change this bill before it returns to the House for final passage.

One last note from this week is a constitutional amendment that has passed out of the Judiciary Committee, of which I am a member.

State Rep. John Ulmer (R-Goshen) presented a proposed amendment that would give each Hoosier the right to "hunt, fish and harvest game." While I do not believe that such a right has ever been in question, I was pleased that Rep. Ulmer agreed to add additional language to the bill that I proposed.

My language was to add that hunting and fishing is a valuable part of heritage and should be forever preserved. It was important to me that if we are to change our treasured constitution concerning a right that we have always inherently

possessed, then we recognize that we have always held that right as Hoosiers.

In other news this week, it was disappointing to see our governor consider it a priority to get rid of protections that enabled more than 25,000 state employees to negotiate their wages and other benefits. In one of his first acts in office, Gov. Daniels eliminated a collective bargaining system started by former Gov. Evan Bayh that has worked successfully for the past 16 years.

I am worried that the governor's decision will remove the rights of these working men and women to get a fair salary, insurance and health care benefits, and give them little recourse if they are fired. We intend to ask the governor to rescind his decision, or pursue legislative remedies to restore rights to these workers.

In other, representatives approved House Bill 1083, which extends the life of the state's earned income tax credit that benefits individuals and families on lower and fixed incomes. Created by the Legislature in 1999, this credit is considered a valuable tool in helping move people from welfare to work. No less a figure of authority than Ronald Reagan called this credit one of the greatest incentives for a person to work that has ever been created.

The upcoming session holds the promise of proposed change for the entire state. I look forward to participating in the debate for this change and fighting for the recognition and continued prosperity of southwest Indiana.

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